

CHAPTER VI

LONDON PRIDE

WHENW T Stead, in the early years of the new twentieth century, was moved to cry, " Since Mr Chamberlain arose in Birmingham, there has been no man so like him as Mr Sidney Webb," he was not thinking of the great works on Trade Union history and function, nor of any other monument of learning and industry associated with the name of Webb He was thinking of an immense and immensely practical accomplishment—the creation of that great network of civic services in London, which are now taken for granted by Londoners, few of whom realise how much of their daily comfort and convenience they owe to him, how much of the opportunities available to their children

Of the London of his childhood, he drew an impressive picture which registers the challenge its then conditions delivered to his youthful mind

"It is impossible, with any brevity, to convey an intelligible notion of the deplorably low state of urban civilisation of the London of my childhood Seventy years ago, the London of three millions of inhabitants had no metropolitan government Such municipal jurisdiction as existed in the 120 square miles was scattered among a maze of pansh vestries, the very existence of which was generally unknown, together with the ancient City Corporation, which took no heed of anything beyond the one square mile under the Lord Mayor Needless to say, the administration was as primitive and barbarous as the jurisdictions were complicated and obscure The slums the all-pervading stench the alternating seas of mud and clouds of poisonous dust of the macadamised streets, the

floating 'blacks*